The Power of Storytelling in Gaming

Community NerdyBirdy May 12, 2022

Gaming is centered on stories. Stories are what bring games to life, what makes them so compelling and irresistible to play. While many games emphasize gameplay mechanics or impressive graphics or visual displays, the storytelling of a game is what binds each of these elements together into a cohesive whole. A story is what transforms hours of gameplay from mere entertainment to a meaningful emotional and artistic experience.

The power of storytelling is especially noteworthy in gaming because of gaming's unique ability to expand a player's world and view. Most movies have under three hours to tell their story whereas many games can stretch out over hundreds of hours. Games can also provide a visual, musical, and cognitive adventure that requires the gamer to actively engage with the provided storyline, at times, even altering events in the game with their actions. This enables games to have an incredible scale and latitude in terms of storytelling. As a result, games can often take on storylines and plots that would be impossible to deliver as a movie, TV show, or book.

Telling Stories From a New Perspective

The incredible range of storytelling techniques in gaming is beneficial not only for our simple entertainment and enjoyment. Gaming has allowed a generation of writers to share creative, innovative, and unique approaches to storytelling. It's impossible to imagine the suspense of *Alan Wake*, the existential inevitability of *What Remains of Edith Finch*, or the musical adventure of *The Artful Escape* existing in any other form or medium.

Gaming has also allowed creators to tell stories from perspectives that are often ignored or neglected. The games *Life is Strange*, *Hades*, and *Tell Me Why* were groundbreaking in their telling of trans and queer experiences.

These games not only helped encourage acceptance and inclusion, they allowed gamers to see positive portrayals of themselves in media.

This is growing more important as the global gaming audience continues to diversify. Gamers today are interested in stories that showcase a greater range in terms of characters, plotlines, and messages. In such cases, storytelling can transcend pure entertainment into a medium for representation and advocacy.

Representation During the Season of the Storyteller

Diverse portrayals in gaming will be especially prominent during the month of May, as this month is Asian and Pacific Islander Heritage month. A time to recognize the contributions and achievements of Asian and Pacific Islanders, this month is also a great time to celebrate the games that feature this in their storytelling.

Games like *Mirror's Edge, Life is Strange: True Colors* and *Sleeping Dogs* feature Asian characters that rise above stereotypes and easy cliches. *Mirror's Edge*' Faith Connors brought an elegant sophistication to the game's stealthy gameplay and *Sleeping Dogs*'s Wei Shen convincingly played the isolation that can come with revisiting one's past. Finally, *Life is Strange: True Colors*' Alex Chen quickly became one of indie gaming's most beloved characters with her memorable personality and composure.

As we celebrate the cultural stories of Asian and Pacific Islander Heritage month this season, let's also recognize the positive impact that storytelling in gaming can have on us. From sharing new perspectives, to providing positive role models, the stories of the games we play can help us celebrate representation and inclusion in our circles and larger communities.